from Letters To Louise: A Love Story, by

 Carol Carruthers Lambert. 2010. O-Wah-Wauna House Publishing, Hammond, OR

About 1887, Robert Carruthers, Dick's father, built a social hall in downtown Astoria. On November 29, 1887, the *Daily Astorian* noted that Benjamin S. Worsley (a notary public who later was involved with Robert in real estate dealings) had started a dancing school in Carruthers Hall. The fee for the ladies was $2.50 for the term of 12 lessons that met at 7:30 o'clock on Tuesday evenings. Eight years later, the newspaper printed an item that the Once-A-Week (Saturday nights) Dancing Club met at Carruthers Hall as usual on February 12, 1895. The dancing lasted "till midnight to exceptionally fine music."

In February 1895, Dick invested in homing pigeons – the purpose of which is not known. However, there is a gap in the correspondence with Louise for one entire year. Letters may have been lost or simply ceased. Or, perhaps, the homing pigeons were used as a means to contact Louise. For both Dick and Louise, life apparently continued normally. Their social life surely increased. Louise, Dick and their friends were active young people. In March of that year, Dick had been made the manager of the Astoria Wharf & Warehouse Company, the only U.S. Bonded warehouse in Astoria - behind what is presently a Burger King franchise. It is a red brick and cement, flat-roofed rectangle, two-stories high, with an interesting façade. Dick's father, Robert Carruthers, erected the building in 1892.

Astoria Wharf & Warehouse Company

Originally, both the U.S. Government (1868) and the State of Oregon (1876) held deeds to many waterfront sites on the Columbia River. By 1892, Pacific Can Company had bought some of those lots, intending to erect several buildings for stamping, soldering and storage of the tin cans used in the rapidly expanding salmon packing industry. Robert Carruthers, Dick's father, drew up plans for a very solidly built structure that fronted on the north side of what was then called Water Street. The address later became known as 114 Front Street, between Third and Fourth Streets.[17] The purpose of the building was to provide secure storage facilities for the large quantities of tin plate essential to the making of cans.

In the spring of 1892, construction began on the Astoria Wharf & Warehouse Company, a waterfront building on Tax Lot 300, Block 3, of McClure's Addition, Astoria. Robert supervised the construction; his father, Richard, still hale-and-hearty at eighty-years old, likely aided him. Richard was a left-handed stonemason, who had learned the trade in England before immigrating to America.

How did Astoria Wharf & Warehouse come by its site? Robert Carruthers might have begun construction of the brick/stone building on Tax Lot 300 while it was still wholly owned by Pacific Can Company – or possibly a gentleman's agreement by just a handshake had sufficed temporarily. It was not until the "19th day of August, A.D. 1892" that an indenture (a deed, a written agreement) was officially signed between the Pacific Can Company – a corporation existing under the laws of California, headquartered in San Francisco – and the Astoria Wharf & Warehouse Company. For the sum of "One Dollar lawful money of the United States," the A.W.&W. Co. took title to a section of Lot 300.

[17] Ordinance #1869 of the City of Astoria (approved April 26, 1894) changed most of the street names – Madison became 3rd Street, Jackson became 4th Street and Water became Front Street.

This deed included "[t]o wit: All the land and tide land, wharfing rights, privileges and easements to the ships channel of the Columbia River lying north of, and in front of, Lot Three (3) in Block (3) Three in the Township (now City) of Astoria as laid out and recorded by John McClure in said County of Clatsop, State of Oregon." Pacific Can's President John Lee and Secretary A.D. Cutter signed and affixed their corporate seal to the notarized document.[18]

A separate agreement, made the same day, was not recorded until October 27, 1892. It was valid for a period of ten years and set forth the obligations and restrictions for the two parties. It especially dealt with which company was liable for the construction, management and maintenance of three wharves to be built contiguously, lying north of, and in front of Lots 1, 2 and 3. (The northerly end of Lot 300 extended over the water well out to the edge of the shipping channel.) The agreement further stated that one-half of the profits derived from all wharfage business done on this large dock was to be paid to Pacific Can Company. This agreement was signed by Lee and Cutter for Pacific Can Co., as well as by Robert Carruthers, President, and W.W. Ridehalgh,[19] Secretary, of A.W.&W. Co. Witnesses were E.W. Tallant and J.Q.A. Bowlby, a Notary Public.[20]

In September 1983, the building's owners were Pat Lavis, a local attorney; Rod Grider, an Astorian architect; Captain Joe Bruneau, a retired Columbia River bar pilot; and Archie Riekkola. Lavis, Grider and Bruneau prepared a nomination/inventory form for placement of the building on the National Register of Historic Places. On February 24, 1984, the nine-member Oregon State Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation recommended that the registry include the structure. "[I]t was the consensus of committee members that this is unique not only in Astoria, but possibly in the state."[21] In a *Daily Astorian* article, dated March 6, 1984, Pat Lavis stated they were all but positive "it is the oldest remaining building on the Astoria waterfront." The paperwork was forwarded to, and accepted by, the National Registry of Historic Places in Washington, D.C.

The structure housed Astoria's only Bonded Warehouse, so-called largely because of its rock-solid masonry construction and the use of heavy-duty timbers inside, which gives a feeling of impenetrability – somewhat like a bank vault. The 50-foot wide, 105-foot long rectangle has two floors plus a basement. Total floor space is 5,250 square feet. Atop basalt stone footings, the specially constructed basement required walls thirty-six inches thick of basalt and granite (possibly ballast off early sailing ships) and a deep floor of stone. This is the only waterfront building in Astoria in which the foundation and entire basement rest below the waterline of the Columbia River.

The building's walls are constructed of brick 18-inches thick (4 courses) from the ground level to the second floor and then 12-inches thick on up to the roof. At some point

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[18] Per the deed recorded at Clatsop County Courthouse on August 24, 1892, in Vol. 25, pp. 336-339. All documents in those days were hand written in oversized ledgers by a Recorder of Conveyance (at this time, Mr. F.I. Dunbar). Corporate seals were not actually impressed in the ledgers, only indicated by a small drawing.

[19] On April 3, 1891, Zoe Carruthers, age 19, the younger of Robert and Harriet Carruthers' two daughters, married Walter W. Ridehalgh in a ceremony held at Grace (Episcopal) Church. Early in 1891, Walter was an accountant for the Samuel Elmore cannery; later he held positions with the Union Fish Cannery.

[20] Recorded deeds: Vol. 25, pp. 667-671.

[21] "Historic nomination gets state's approval," (*Daily Astorian.* March 6, 1984), 4.

in time the brickwork on three sides of the building was lightly covered with a concrete gunite coating to prevent deterioration and to improve water resistance. Over the years, layers of rolled asphalt have covered the flat roof, originally made of tin. Heavy steel shutters on the windows provide security. The sliding wooden doors are also made doubly secure by sheathings of heavy sheet metal. Romanesque window arches are of brick and wood with granite sills. The inset main doublewide door, facing south, has not only a granite sill, but also a special granite keystone. Reportedly quarried from the Chinook Quarry, this granite was originally used for the 1852 Customs Building that was the first U. S. Federal building erected west of the Rocky Mountains. When Astoria's original Customs House was demolished, some of the granite was incorporated into the Astoria Wharf and Warehouse Company building.

The December 14, 1892 issue of the *Daily Morning Astorian* noted that locally fired brick was used for the walls - May & Thair had produced it in their kilns on the Lewis and Clark River. Lavis, Grider & Bruneau reported that samples of several other types of brick were used in the construction to provide a comparison with the durability of the May & Thair brick. They also noted that three blue bricks from China were cemented above the main entry's granite keystone arch and some $45 dollars-per-thousand bricks from San Francisco were inset into the exterior walls.

The first floor is constructed of mainly old growth Douglas fir with heavy posts, beams and flooring. The first-floor joists of heavy timbers rest upon steel railroad rails embedded into the exterior brick walls. This added strength allows for up to "3,000 TUNS" of goods (1,200 pounds per square foot) to be stored on that level. The twelve "bays" on the main floor are still being used as storage areas.

Construction was completed by December 1892 and put into use to store the huge quantities of tin plate being brought by the shiploads to Astoria. The thriving salmon canning industry could not function without this basic material. A report in the "Clatsop County" column in the Portland *Oregonian* on January 1, 1882, estimated that each salmon cost cannery owners seventy cents - the purchase of tin plate to make the cans made up a substantial part of the cost. "In 1880, 6,188 boxes of tin plate were imported direct to Astoria. In 1881, 37,768 [boxes], while in 1882 it exceeded even that amount."[22] To pack 1,000 cases of salmon took 107 boxes. Each box of tin plate weighed an average of 109 pounds, and, in 1882, cost $6.50. Adequate and secure storage space was essential. The federal government insured the building and contents.

At age twenty-one, Dick, the company's secretary, was "placed in charge" as the company's manager according to a notice in the March 9, 1895 issue of the *Daily Morning Astorian*. A year later, in an undated letter written about March 20, 1896, Dick wrote Louise:

> *"Everyone has sold out of the A. W. W. Co now except Dr. E. C. Carter, a 1/10 owner. I am still here representing Uncle Sam[23] for a week longer. Then what I don't know."*

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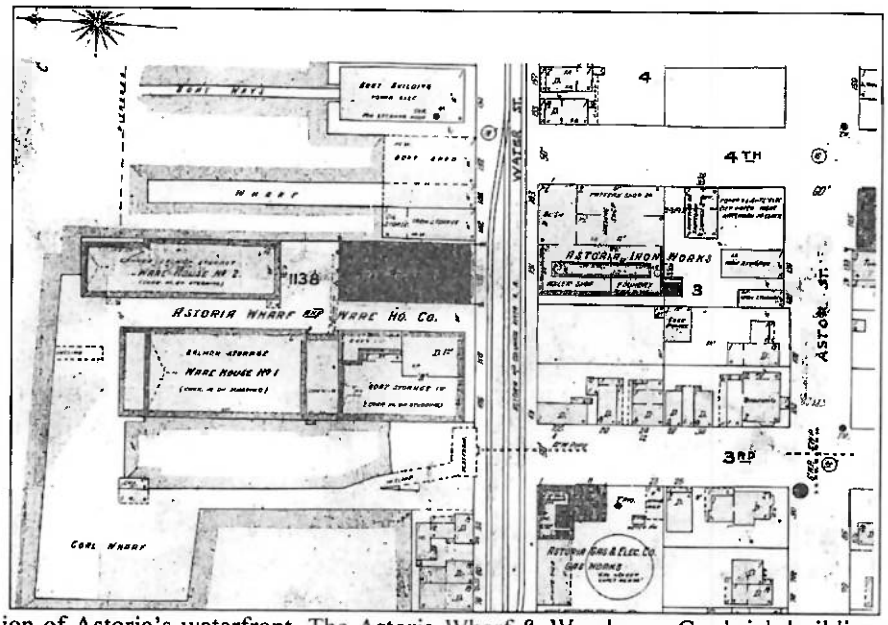
[22] Holden, "Growth and Prosperity of Astoria," (Portland: January 1, 1882), 99. Holden, a former Associated Press agent, created a scrapbook of his articles printed in the Portland *Oregonian* and Astoria newspapers. His collection was donated to Clatsop County Historical Society.

[23] The United States Government held the warehouse in bond.

On Easter Sunday, April 5, 1896, he wrote:

> *"I left the warehouse on the first. Since then I've been collecting for Prael Co and tomorrow I am going down to the warehouse to unload a tinship for the new company - not all by myself but just look out the same as before."*



A small section of Astoria's waterfront. The Astoria Wharf & Warehouse Co. brick building with the flat roof is the dark rectangle in the center. The E. W. Tallant family dwelling - 1882-1896 - is located on the NE corner of Third Street and Astor on this 1908 Sanborn-Perris Company Insurance map.

Built over 116 years ago, the building is still standing north of the old Astoria & Columbia River Railroad track right-of-way (later called the Burlington Northern R.R.) behind what is now the Burger King fast food eatery. Over the years at least three major fires have destroyed many of the surrounding buildings, but the Astoria Wharf & Warehouse Company building was left essentially unscathed. All the original exterior and interior materials remain in good condition. Robert Carruthers, thanks to his masonry and building skills, built a building to last.

During the period 1880 to 1920, Astoria was at its zenith in the fishing and canning industry. Between 1892 and 1950, seven different companies occupied the Bonded Warehouse premises. Samuel Elmore bought the A.W. & W. Co along with all the Pacific Can Company buildings about 1909. By early 1972, Archie Riekkola and his partners obtained the title to the consolidated area. The A.W.&W. building has been leased out for a variety of purposes, including housing cars belonging to the Lovell Auto Company, storing building materials used in the construction of the nearby Columbia House condominiums and as a workshop for building outdoor log furniture. Since 1998 this historic building has been owned by Steve Fick's Fishhawk Fisheries, Inc. and used for storage.

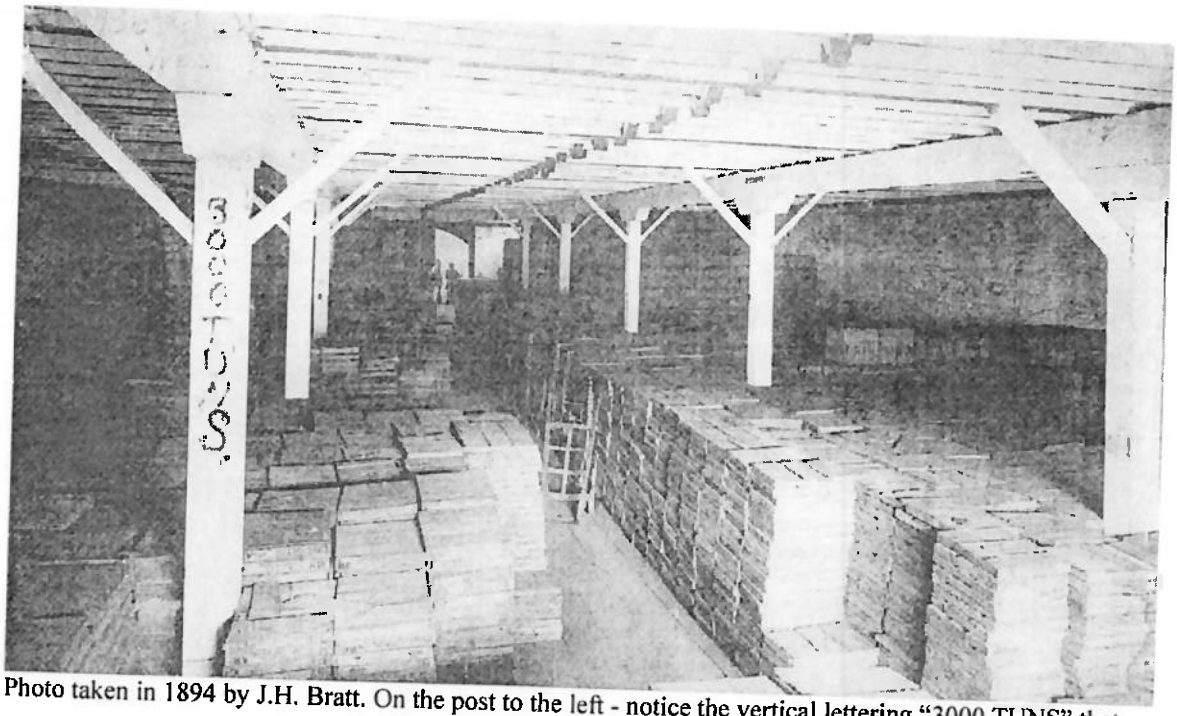


Photo taken in 1894 by J.H. Bratt. On the post to the left - notice the vertical lettering "3000 TUNS" that refers to the weight the floor was built to hold.

About half of the gunite material spread over three of the walls in earlier times has fallen off – or been removed – exposing the original brickwork, which, for the most part, remains uncleaned. More recent owners spread a thick layer of material – concrete probably - over the façade of the building and painted it a pleasant rusty-red color. Disappointingly however, in doing this, some of the historic aspects of this building have been covered up. The three blue Chinese tiles and the granite keystone are no longer visible. Nor is there any definition to the bricks forming the façade wall. The front of the building has lost its original interesting historic character.

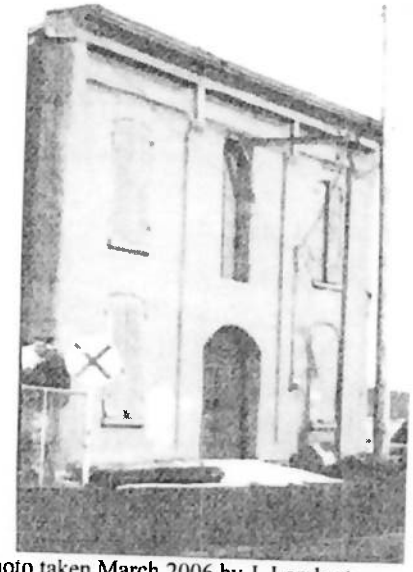
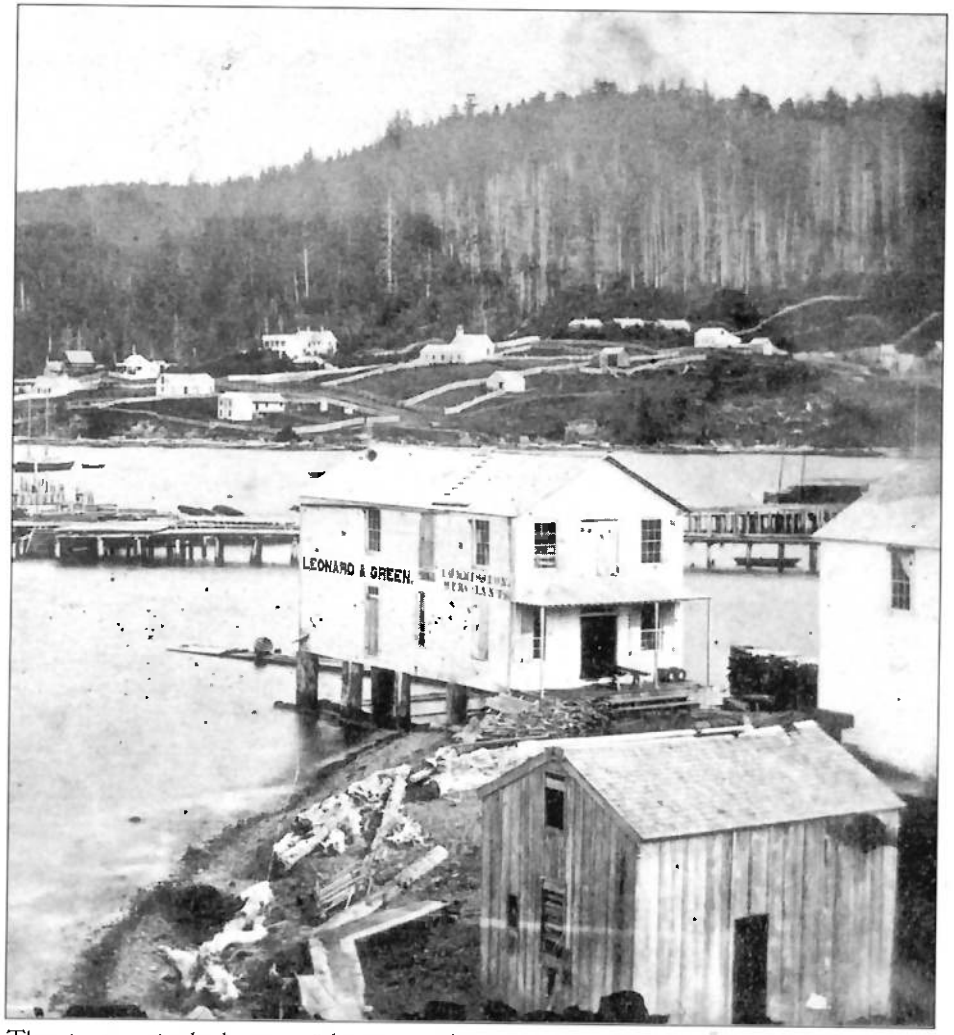


Photo taken March 2006 by J. Lambert
The façade of the Astoria Wharf and Warehouse today.



The structure in the bottom right corner of this photo is the Shark House as it appeared after the original logs were covered over by planking. Sailors from the wreck of the Sloop of War Shark erected the cabin while they awaited transportation to San Francisco. Later, it was occupied by people from the wreck of Paul Corno's bark industry, the family of James Welch and the Samuel T. McKean family. #4471

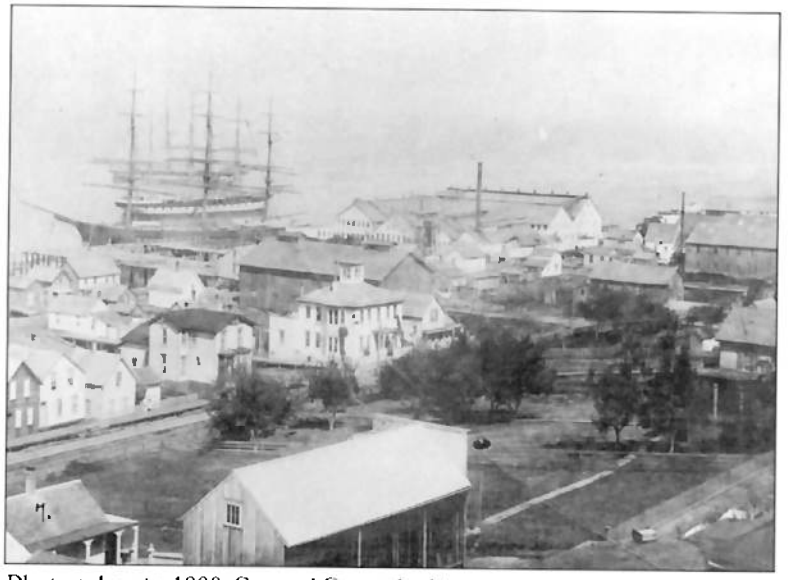
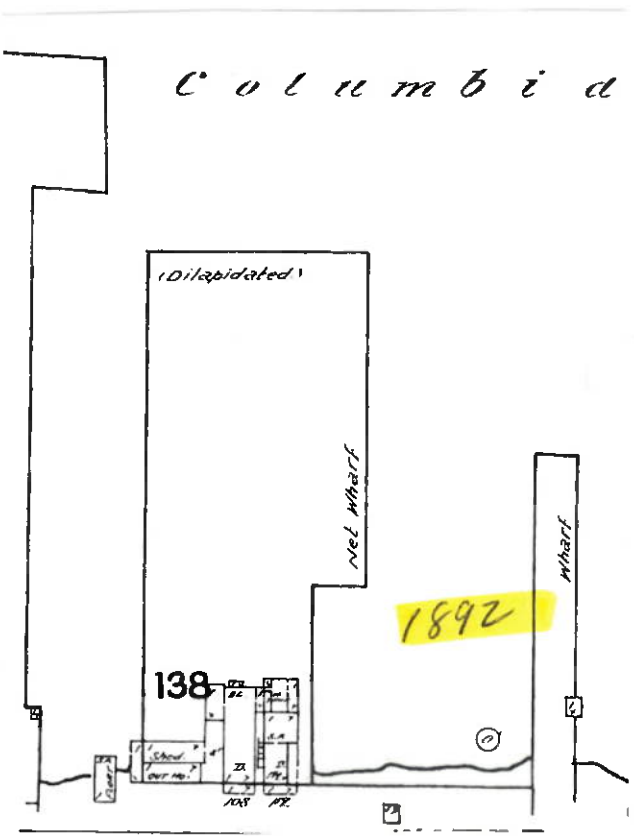


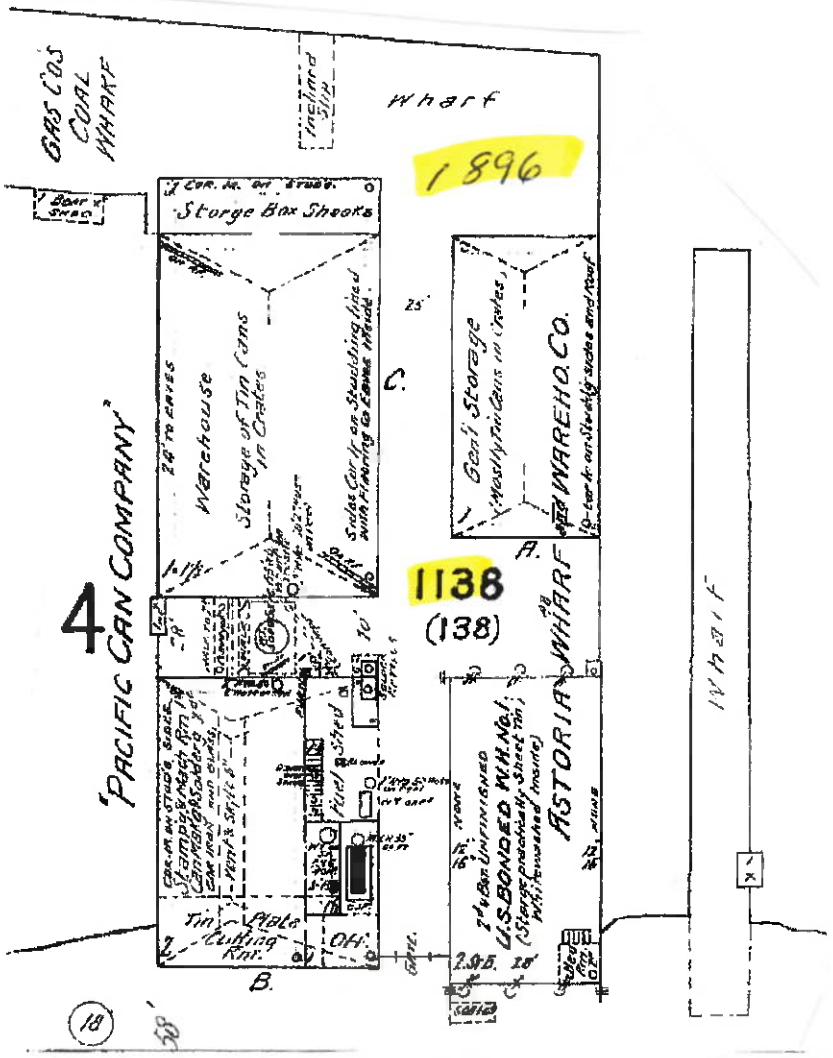
Photo taken in 1888. Second Street looking northeast. Kinney Cannery on the waterfront. #1575

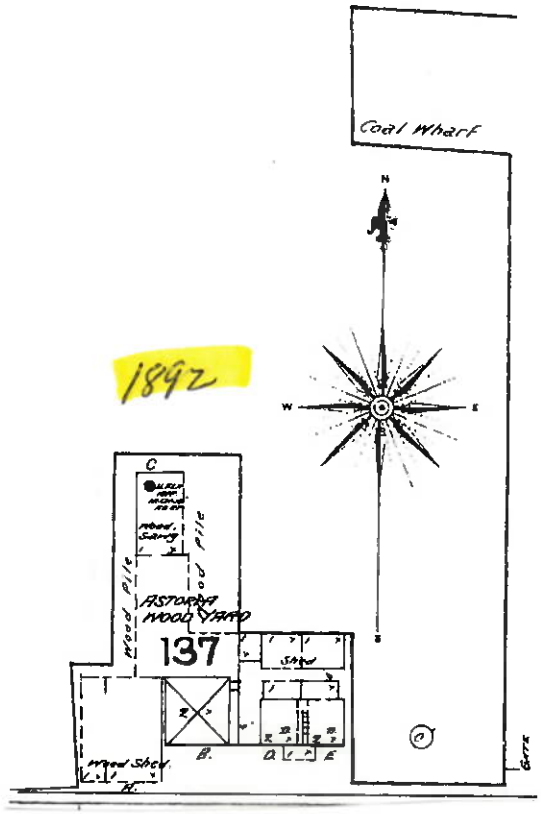
State Militia (National Guard) encampment on the grounds of the post office during the 1896 strike of fishermen and canneries. #9942

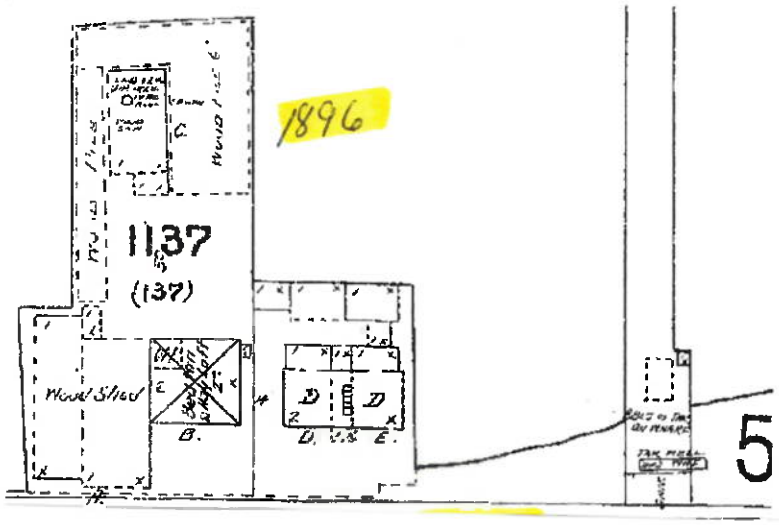
1568

1138


Columbia
(Dilapidated)
Net Wharf
1892
138
Wharf


GAS CO'S COAL WHARF
Wharf
1896
Storage Box Shooks
Warehouse
Storage of Tin Cans in Crates
Gen'l Storage
Mach'y in Cans in Crates
WAREHO. Co.
4
"PACIFIC CAN COMPANY"
1138
(138)
ASTORIA
Wharf
Tin Plate Cutting Rm.
OH.
U.S. BONDED WH. No. 1
B.
C.
A.
(18)


1892
Coal Wharf
N
W
E
S
C
Wood Pile
Astoria Wood Yard
137
Saw
B.
D
E
Wood Shed
Gate


1896
1137
(137)
Wood Shed
B.
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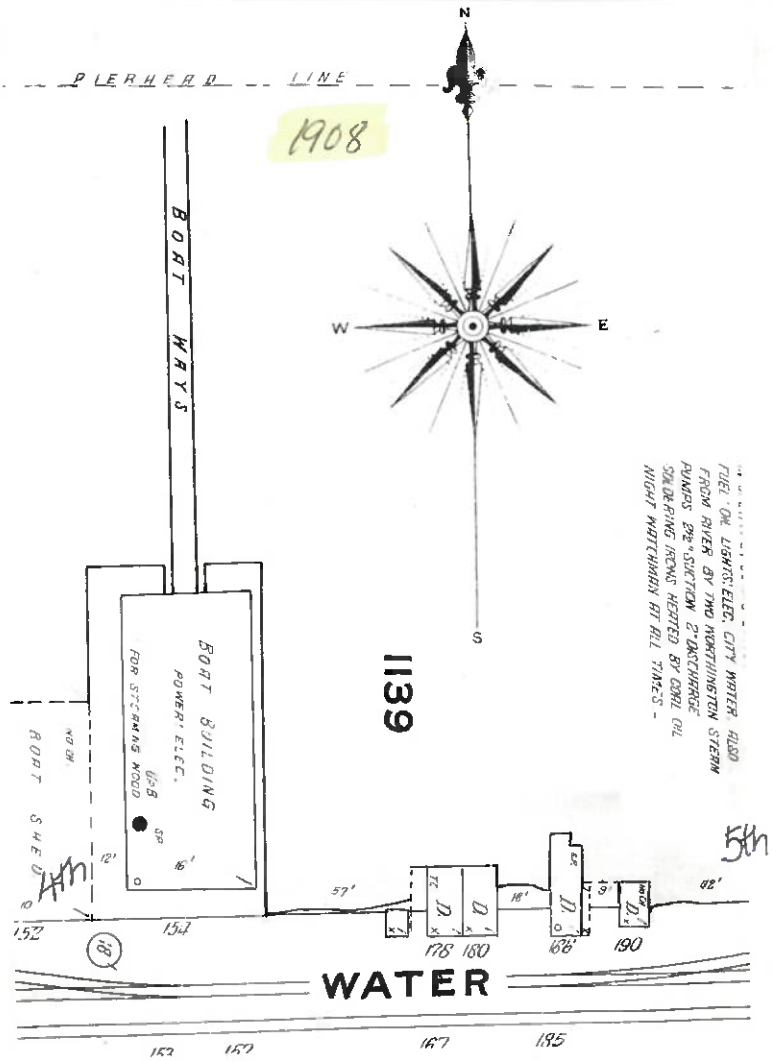
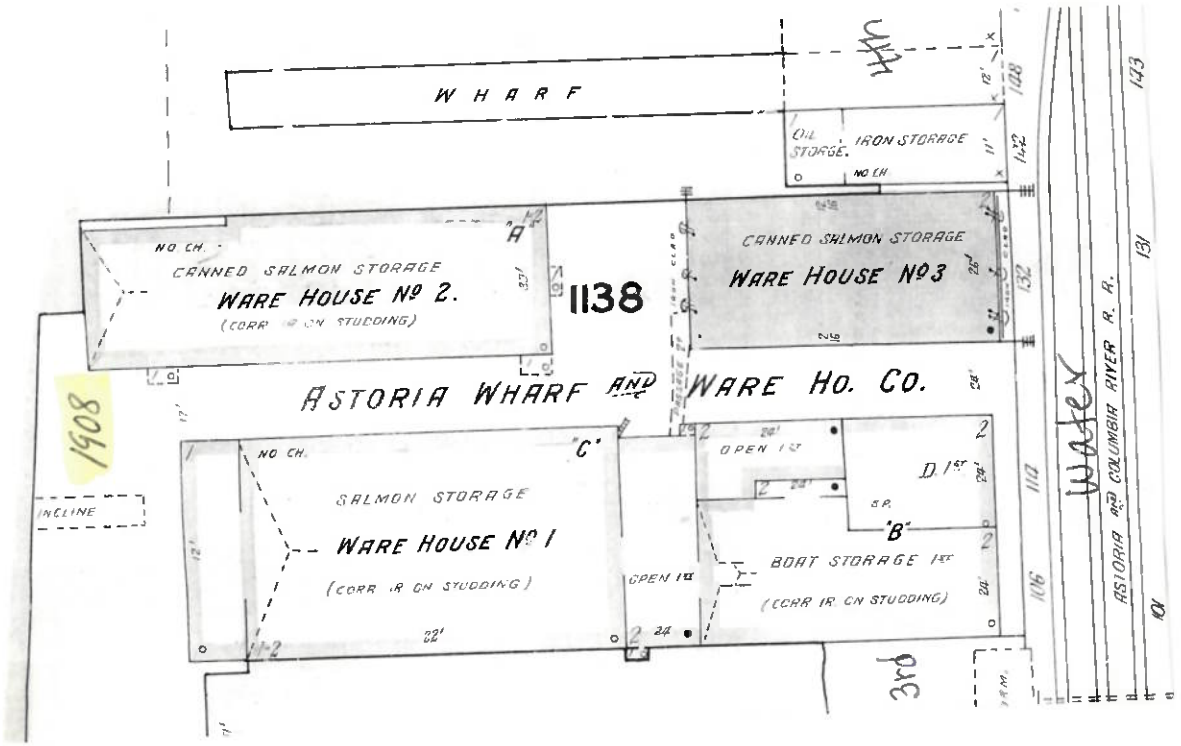
D. D. E.

5


PIERHEAD LINE
1908
BOAT HAYS
N
W
E
S
1139
BOAT BUILDING
FOR SCHOONERS MOOD
POWER ELEC.
BOAT SHED
FUEL OIL LIGHTED, CITY WATER ALSO
FROM RIVER BY TWO WORTHINGTON STEAM
PUMPS 2½" SUCTION 2" DISCHARGE
SOME PUMPING DONE HERTED BY COAL OIL
NIGHT WATCHMAN AT ALL TIMES -
4th
5th
57'
16'
82'
152
154
178 180
188
190
WATER
152
157
167
185


WHARF
OIL STORGE.
IRON STORAGE
NO CH.
CANNED SALMON STORAGE
WARE HOUSE Nº 2.
(CORR IR ON STUDDING)
"A"
1138
CANNED SALMON STORAGE
WARE HOUSE Nº 3
ASTORIA WHARF AND WARE HO. CO.
1908
NO CH.
"C"
SALMON STORAGE
WARE HOUSE Nº 1
(CORR IR ON STUDDING)
OPEN 1ST
D. 1ST
S.P.
"B"
BOAT STORAGE 1ST
(CORR IR ON STUDDING)
INCLINE
3rd
WATER
ASTORIA AND COLUMBIA RIVER R. R.